

REL Appalachia Ask A REL Response

Discipline, Educator Effectiveness
February 2020

Question:

What does the research say about state policies and programs to promote culturally responsive instruction, equity and inclusion, positive school climates, and to counter implicit bias in schools?

Response:

Thank you for your request to our REL Reference Desk regarding evidence-based information about state efforts to promote culturally responsive instruction, equity and inclusion, positive school climates, and to counter implicit bias in schools. Ask A REL is a collaborative reference desk service provided by the 10 Regional Educational Laboratories (RELs) that, by design, functions much in the same way as a technical reference library. Ask A REL provides references, referrals, and brief responses in the form of citations in response to questions about available education research.

Following an established REL Appalachia research protocol, we searched for peer-reviewed articles and other research reports that specifically addressed state policies and programs to support equity, inclusion and positive school climates, and counter implicit bias in schools. The sources included ERIC and other federally funded databases and organizations, research institutions, academic research databases, and general Internet search engines. For more details, please see the methods section at the end of this document.

The research team did not evaluate the quality of the resources provided in this response; we offer them only for your reference. Also, the search included the most commonly used research databases and search engines to produce the references presented here, but the references are not necessarily comprehensive, and other relevant references and resources may exist. References are listed in alphabetical order, not necessarily in order of relevance.

References

Akiba, M., Cockrell, K. S., Simmons, J. C., Han, S., & Agarwal, G. (2010). Preparing teachers for diversity: Examination of teacher certification and program accreditation standards in the 50 states and Washington, DC. *Equity & Excellence in Education*, 43(4), 446–462. Abstract retrieved from <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ905337>; full text available at

https://www.researchgate.net/publication/233178848_Preparing_Teachers_for_Diversity_Examination_of_Teacher_Certification_and_Program_Accreditation_Standards_in_the_50_States_and_Washington_DC

From the abstract: “State departments of education can play an important role in preparing teachers for effectively teaching diverse learners in our schools through state policies and standards on teacher certification and teacher education program accreditation. We conducted a content analysis of state standards on teacher certification and program accreditation in the 50 states and the District of Columbia to understand the type and characteristics of diversity-related requirements. We found that while all states addressed diversity in their standards, the type and characteristics of requirements varied across the states. The diversity requirements are ambiguous in most states, and only a small number of states utilize a ‘social reconstructionist’ approach that focuses on preparing teachers to identify social inequality and take an active role to achieve educational and social equity.”

Cohen, J., McCabe, L., Michelli, N. M., & Pickeral, T. (2009). School climate: Research, policy, practice, and teacher education. *Teachers College Record*, 111(1), 180–213. Abstract retrieved from <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ826002>; full text available at <http://www.tcrecord.org/Content.asp?ContentId=15220>

From the abstract: “Background/Context: Educators have written about and studied school climate for 100 years. School climate refers to the quality and character of school life. School climate is based on patterns of people’s experiences of school life and reflects norms, goals, values, interpersonal relationships, teaching and learning practices, and organizational structures. However, school climate is more than individual experience: It is a group phenomenon that is larger than any one person’s experience. A sustainable, positive school climate fosters youth development and learning necessary for a productive, contributive, and satisfying life in a democratic society. This climate includes norms, values, and expectations that support people feeling socially, emotionally, and physically safe. People are engaged and respected. Students, families, and educators work together to develop, live, and contribute to a shared school vision. Educators model and nurture an attitude that emphasizes the benefits of, and satisfaction from, learning. Each person contributes to the operations of the school and the care of the physical environment. School climate refers to spheres of school life (e.g. safety, relationships, teaching and learning, the environment) as well as to larger organizational patterns (e.g., from fragmented to cohesive or ‘shared’ vision, healthy or unhealthy, conscious or unrecognized). These definitions were collaboratively developed and agreed upon at a consensus-building meeting of national practice and policy leaders organized in April 2007 by the National Center for Learning and Citizenship, Education Commission of the States, and the National School Climate Center at the Center for Social and Emotional Education. Purpose/Objective/Research Question/Focus of Study: This article examines the relationship between school-climate-related research findings on the one hand and educational policy, school improvement practice, and teacher education on the other. Research Design: This article uses several research methods to understand the current state of school climate research, policy, practice, and teacher education: historical analysis, a

review of the literature, a systemic national State Department of Education policy scan, and a national survey ($N = 40$) of building, district, and state educational leaders about school climate measurement and improvement practices. Findings/Results: A review of the literature reveals that a growing body of empirical research indicates that positive school climate is associated with and predictive of academic achievement, school success, effective violence prevention, students' healthy development, and teacher retention. There is a glaring gap between these research findings on the one hand, and state departments of education, school climate policy, practice guidelines, and teacher education practice on the other. Conclusions/Recommendations: We detail how the gap between school climate research, policy, practice, and teacher education is socially unjust and a violation of children's human rights. We now have research-based guidelines that predictably support positive youth development and student learning. If we do so, we are supporting children, educators, parents, communities, and the foundation for democratic process, but as a country, we are not doing so. Our children deserve better. A series of detailed recommendations are suggested for policy makers, practice leaders, and teacher educators to narrow this gap and support students' healthy development and capacity to learn."

Curran, F. C. (2016). Estimating the effect of state zero tolerance laws on exclusionary discipline, racial discipline gaps, and student behavior. *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, 38(4), 647–668. Abstract retrieved from <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1119782>.

From the abstract: "Zero tolerance discipline policies have come under criticism as contributors to racial discipline gaps; however, few studies have explicitly examined such policies. This study utilizes data from two nationally representative data sources to examine the effect of state zero tolerance laws on suspension rates and principal perceptions of problem behaviors. Utilizing state and year fixed effects models, this study finds that state zero tolerance laws are predictive of a 0.5 percentage point increase in district suspension rates and no consistent decreases in principals' perceptions of problem behaviors. Furthermore, the results indicate that the laws are predictive of larger increases in suspension rates for Blacks than Whites, potentially contributing to the Black–White suspension gap. Implications for policy and practice are discussed."

Feldman, S., & Winchester, I. (2015). Racial-equity policy as leadership practice: Using social practice theory to analyze policy as practice. *International Journal of Multicultural Education*, 17(1), 62–81. Retrieved from <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1104931>

From the abstract: "This, primarily theoretical, paper takes up the longstanding problem of the disconnection between education policy and leadership practice. The authors propose the use of social practice theory as a tool for educational leaders at the state, school district, and school levels, to eliminate the disconnection between policy design and leadership action. Using Oregon as an example, the authors illustrate a relationship between equity- policy design and leadership practice that may help identify weaknesses and strengths in equity- policy designs and ultimately support better equity policy for leadership practice."

Gagnon, D. J., & Mattingly, M. J. (2015). State policy responses to ensuring excellent educators in rural schools. *Journal of Research in Rural Education*, 30(13), 1–14. Abstract retrieved from <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1083786>; full text available at <https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/9b8a/5b3f54b63758b27bfe0d5f1e0983aa1611a8.pdf>

From the abstract: “The Excellent Educators for All initiative is the most recent federal policy effort to address unequal access to teacher quality in the United States. States were required to submit equity plans to the U.S. Department of Education that detailed how to ensure that poor and minority children do not receive instruction from less qualified teachers. States could extend their plans to include rural students, although this was not a statutory requirement. Past federal reform efforts around raising teacher quality have been widely criticized as being overly prescriptive, and ultimately failing to account for the unique contexts of rural schools. We examine the extent to which rural needs are addressed in all available state equity plans. We find that roughly half of U.S. states examine equity gaps along the urban-rural continuum, and roughly half propose rural-specific policy solutions to improve rural school staffing, although less than a third do both. States across the country employ a range of strategies in roughly equal measure, including grow your own programs, financial incentives, communities of practice, and capacity building. In addition to detailing findings and providing nuanced examples, this article also discusses implications for students and state policy.”

Gregory, A., & Fergus, E. (2017). Social and emotional learning and equity in school discipline. *The Future of Children*, 27(1), 117–136. Retrieved from <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1144814>

From the abstract: “Beginning as early as preschool, race and gender are intertwined with the way US schools mete out discipline. In particular, black students and male students are much more likely than others to be suspended or expelled—punishments that we know can hold them back academically. These disparities, and the damage they can cause, have driven recent reforms, including some that incorporate social and emotional learning (SEL) practices. Anne Gregory and Edward Fergus review federal and state mandates to cut down on punishments that remove students from school, and they show how some districts are embracing SEL in their efforts to do so. Yet even in these districts, large disparities in discipline persist. The authors suggest two reasons current discipline reforms that embrace SEL practices may hold limited promise for reducing discipline disparities. The first is that prevailing ‘colorblind’ notions of SEL don’t consider power, privilege, and cultural difference—thus ignoring how individual beliefs and structural biases can lead educators to react harshly to behaviors that fall outside a white cultural frame of reference. The second is that most SEL models are centered on students, but not on the adults who interact with them. Yet research shows that educators’ own social and emotional competencies strongly influence students’ motivation to learn and the school climate in general. Gregory and Fergus describe how one school district is striving to orient its discipline policies around a conception of SEL that stresses equity and promotes both adults’ and students’ SEL competencies. Although such reforms hold promise, they are still in the early stages, and the authors call for rigorous empirical work to test whether such efforts can substantially reduce or eradicate racial and gender disparities in discipline.”

Additional Ask A REL Responses to Consult

Ask a REL Appalachia at SRI International. (2019). *What are some promising practices to address racially motivated hate crimes and promote a positive school climate in middle and high schools?* Retrieved from <https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/edlabs/regions/appalachia/askarel/aar66.asp>

Ask a REL Mid-Atlantic at Mathematica. (2019). *What is the research on the effectiveness or impact of culturally responsive teaching practices on student outcomes?* Retrieved from https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/edlabs/regions/midatlantic/askarel_106.asp

Ask a REL Northeast and Islands at EDC. (2017). *What empirical information is there about reducing the inequity gap through school practices and/or policy reform?* Retrieved from <https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/edlabs/regions/northeast/AskAREI/Response/40>

Ask a REL Northwest at Education Northwest. (2018). *What does the research say about the effectiveness and implementation of restorative practices in schools?* Retrieved from <https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/edlabs/regions/northwest/askarel/restorative-justice.asp>

Ask a REL Southeast at Florida State University. (2019). *What research has been conducted on how equity training and technical assistance for school and district staff in the use of culturally responsive/relevant and restorative practices impacts school climate, particularly in middle school?* Retrieved from https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/edlabs/regions/southeast/aar/u_07-2019.asp

Ask A REL West at WestEd. (2018). *What is the relationship between culturally inclusive practices and student outcomes?* Retrieved from <https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/edlabs/regions/west/Ask/Details/2>

Additional Organizations to Consult

The Aspen Institute: Education and Society Program:

<https://www.aspeninstitute.org/programs/education-and-society-program/>

From the website: “The Aspen Institute Education & Society Program (Aspen Education) improves public education by inspiring, informing, and influencing education leaders across policy and practice, with an emphasis on achieving equity for students of color and children from low-income backgrounds. Aspen Education supports leaders at all levels, from networks of urban superintendents and their teams, to state chiefs and their cabinets, to elected officials and their staffers...Our work is focused on four critical priority areas:

- Embracing a richer vision of student success that integrates social, emotional, and academic dimensions of learning into the fabric of schools and the student experience as essential to advancing equity.
- Fostering coherence and continuous improvement practices at the system level which is vital to enabling a richer vision of student success to take hold and thrive.
- Developing education leaders to more authentically engage communities, transcend political and ideological debates, and build diverse coalitions for transformation in learning.
- Understanding and addressing poverty in America by fostering connections across education and: housing, health and nutrition, transportation, and criminal justice policy and addressing the impact of race and racism on opportunity in America.”

Council of Chief State School Officers: <https://ccsso.org/>

From the website: “The Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) is a nonpartisan, nationwide, nonprofit organization of public officials who head departments of elementary and secondary education in the states, the District of Columbia, the Department of Defense Education Activity, the Bureau of Indian Education and the five U.S. extra-state jurisdictions. As an organization, we are committed to ensuring that all students participating in our public education system—regardless of background—graduate prepared for college, careers, and life.”

- States Leading for Equity: Promising Practices Advancing the Equity Commitments: <https://www.ccsso.org/sites/default/files/2018-02/States%20Leading%20for%20Equity%20Online.pdf>

IDRA EAC-South: <https://www.idraeacsouth.org/>

From the website: “The IDRA EAC-South builds bridges among administrators, teachers, parents, students and community members so that all stakeholders can find that common higher ground where all students will benefit regardless of race, sex or national origin. The center’s philosophy maintains that desegregated school settings must ensure full inclusion and participation by all students and their parents regardless of race, sex, national origin or religion. The IDRA EAC-South is one of four federally funded centers that provide technical assistance and training at the request of school districts and other responsible governmental agencies to build capacity of local educators to ensure a more equitable learning environment for all students.”

National School Climate Center: <https://www.schoolclimate.org/>

From the website: “Our mission is to measure and improve the climate for learning in schools to help children realize their fullest potential as individuals and as engaged members of society.”

Methods

Keywords and Search Strings

The following keywords and search strings were used to search the reference databases and other sources:

- (“state policy” OR “state policies” OR “state program”) AND (school OR education) AND (“cultural competen*” OR “cultural* responsiv*” OR ethnic* OR minorit*) AND (equit* OR inclusion OR climate OR “implicit bias”)

Databases and Resources

We searched ERIC, a free online library of more than 1.6 million citations of education research sponsored by the Institute of Education Sciences (IES), for relevant resources. Additionally, we searched the academic database ProQuest, Google Scholar, and the commercial search engine Google.

Reference Search and Selection Criteria

In reviewing resources, Reference Desk researchers consider—among other things—these four factors:

- **Date of the publication:** Searches cover information available within the last ten years, except in the case of nationally known seminal resources.
- **Reference sources:** IES, nationally funded, and certain other vetted sources known for strict attention to research protocols receive highest priority. Applicable resources must be publicly available online and in English.
- **Methodology:** The following methodological priorities/considerations guide the review and selection of the references: (a) study types—randomized controlled trials, quasi experiments, surveys, descriptive data analyses, literature reviews, policy briefs, etc., generally in this order; (b) target population, samples (representativeness of the target population, sample size, volunteered or randomly selected), study duration, etc.; (c) limitations, generalizability of the findings and conclusions, etc.
- **Existing knowledge base:** Vetted resources (e.g., peer-reviewed research journals) are the primary focus, but the research base is occasionally slim or nonexistent. In those cases, the best resources available may include, for example, reports, white papers, guides, reviews in non-peer-reviewed journals, newspaper articles, interviews with content specialists, and organization websites.

Resources included in this document were last accessed on February 19, 2020. URLs, descriptions, and content included here were current at that time.

This memorandum is one in a series of quick-turnaround responses to specific questions posed by education stakeholders in the Appalachia region (Kentucky, Tennessee, Virginia, and West Virginia), which is served by the Regional Educational Laboratory Appalachia (REL AP) at SRI International. This Ask A REL response was developed by REL AP under Contract ED-IES- 17-C-0004 from the U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, administered by SRI International. The content does not necessarily reflect the views or policies of IES or the U.S. Department of Education, nor does mention of trade names, commercial products, or organizations imply endorsement by the U.S. government.